\$2.50

# Lutheran Voman Today



No Exceptions Surprising Packages The Present of Presence Return to Sender



## WE BELIEVE

EVERY INVESTOR DESERVES A GREAT RATE.

JUST LIKE EVERY PERSON DESERVES A WARM MEAL.



April 21, 2009.

Edmonds Lutheran Church, Edmonds, Washington.

Save for your future with the Mission Investment Fund and you not only get a great rate of return, you also help fund building and renovation loans for ELCA congregations like Edmonds Lutheran Church. Edmonds used an MIF loan to renovate its cramped kitchen, where it now prepares a bustling weekly dinner for the homeless and hungry. Turning donated food into chicken enchiladas? It may not be quite the same as turning water into wine, but it's still a miracle to behold. To learn more, contact us at 877.886.3522 or elca.org/mif.



Mission Investment Fund Evangelical Lutheran Church in America God's work. Our hands.



43 Directory of Reader Services





Editor Kate Sprutta Elliott Managing Editor Terri Lackey Editor, *Café* Elizabeth McBride

Art Direction On Track Marketing Cover Hieronymus Bosch www.lutheranwomantoday.org

#### **GIFTS IN GRACE**

#### **VOLUME 23 NUMBER 10 DECEMBER 2010**

We need to discover and use our spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ.

6	No Exceptions	Every one of us has spiritual gifts. We just need to unwrap and share them.  Angie Shannon
10	ELCA HIV and AIDS Strategy: More than a Number	When one member of the body of Christ suffers, we all suffer. Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl
14	Surprising Packages	Sometimes the gifts we receive come from unlikely sources. Kati Kluckman-Ault
18	The Present of Presence	Perhaps this year, we should give the gift of time and attention to those we love.  Diane Monroe
22	Return to Sender	Sometimes our spiritual gifts are not the ones we would choose. Christa von Zychlin
DEPARTMENTS		
4	Voices	Gifts in Grace Kate Sprutta Elliott
5	Give Us This Day	Coming Home Karen Bates-Olson
9	Let Us Pray	The Bread of Life Julie K. Aageson
26	Health Wise	Move It, Shake It Molly M. Ginty
28	Bible Study The People of God: Unity in the Midst of Diversity	Session 4: Gifts of the Spirit Our gifts come from the Holy Spirit for the good of the church. They help us act boldly on our faith in Jesus Christ. Jensen and Linda Johnson Seyenkulo
41	Grace Notes	The Hardest Job Linda Post Bushkofsky
42	Amen!	Grateful, Not Proud Catherine Malotky
PLUS		
34	ELCA Social Statement: Caring for Health	Another in a series of articles that explore the ELCA Social Statements Roger A. Willer
37	Women Quilting Boldly	Women of the ELCA groups offer care through quilts.
36	Pajama Project Wakes	A California church's sewing ministry unites neighbors in service. Terri Lackey

#### www.lutheranwomantoday.org

Subscription, editorial, and advertising information



VOICES

### **Gifts in Grace**

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

A few years ago, my mom gave me a gift that seemed sort of boring. It was a travel pouch that contained a set of tweezers and a magnifying mirror ("Magnifies FIVE times!" the label shouted). At the time I thought, well, OK. Little did I know.

Now that I'm in my 50s, I really value that travel set and have packed it for many trips. There are some gifts you have to grow into. Sometimes you can't see how helpful the gift might be. And I think there are some gifts that aren't truly valued until they've been used.

This month in the Bible study, we explore the topic of spiritual gifts. The writers tell us, "The gifts come from the Holy Spirit and can sometimes strengthen us to do things we did not think we could do. Sometimes people around us see those gifts in us more than we do." Do you see your gifts? Or is it easier to see the gifts of others?

Angie Shannon writes in "No Exceptions" that, "we already have our spiritual gifts. It is up to us to . . . share them with the world. Popular religious imagination has led us to believe that spiritual gifts are granted exclusively to an elite group of Christians who merit them. Nothing could be further from the truth!"

Sometimes we are blessed with spiritual gifts that we wouldn't have chosen. In "Return to Sender," Christa von Zychlin asks, "So what do we do when our spiritual gifts conflict with one or more of our natural inclinations or limitations? Ask God for a trade-in?" But she assures us that "sometimes it is the most unlikely

gifts, the ones we never would have asked for, that result in the most delicious fruit of the Spirit, including love, kindness, and joy."

Sometimes the gifts seem unlikely—and sometimes the gifts we receive come from unlikely sources. In "Surprising Packages" deaconess Kati Kluckman-Ault shares a story about one of the members of her congregation, a woman who would not appear to have much to give: "It was easy to overlook this woman as one with gifts to offer because she also is one with great needs. One of the wonders of God's gift of grace is that through God's work in us, we are changed so that we are both giver and receiver of gifts."

In this season of gift-giving, Diane Monroe suggests that the best gift might not cost you a cent—the gift of time. In "The Present of Presence," she encourages us to "consider ways we might mirror God's love for the world by giving the gift of *ourselves* this year." She shares some creative ways to do that.

Also in this issue, we learn about the ELCA's HIV and AIDS strategy in Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl's article, "More Than a Number." She reminds us that this church cares about people affected by HIV and AIDS because as members of the body of Christ, "when one member suffers, we all suffer."

Finally, we wish you and yours a blessed Advent and Christmas. May these busy days also be very joyful. \*\*

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of Lutheran Woman Today. You may write to her at LWT@elca.org.



IVE US THIS DAY

## **Coming Home**

y Karen Bates-Olson

## Our family has long

celebrated Advent by lighting candles placed on an Advent log each Sunday of the season. We hunt for the log throughout the year, scouring driftwood on Puget Sound beaches. As the four Sundays of Advent pass, we gather around the log, singing songs of faith, praying prayers of hope. We light the candles, asking our Lord Jesus to come, remembering the joy he has brought to the world.

No matter that life around me rushes toward Christmas, Advent has always called to me of quiet waiting. And Advent has never meant more to me than in the last few years.

When our oldest daughter—a child of Advent—turned 13, we moved from a beloved home so that I could take a new call. What I heard as the voice of God, she heard as law, as pain. Like the prodigal of old, she left us—not physically, but spiritually and emotionally. Her anger knew no bounds. She abandoned her intelligence and her gifts of art and beauty. She put up barriers against our love. She refused to sing the songs of faith, to offer prayers. She refused the company of believers. Advent came and went for three long seasons, and she remained stubborn in silence.

Two years ago, her younger sister—a child of Epiphany—was asked to serve as Lucia, the servant of light, during an Advent festival for local churches. Our youngest walked into worship with light on her brow, remembering the call to the poor, the coming again of Jesus. We rejoiced in her hope, yet grieving for the

one whose back was up stiffly against the light.

I prayed. I prayed again, making the prayers action, desperately and hopefully trying to reach our prodigal with thought, word, and deed. I prayed with the precious longing of Advent, "Come, Lord Jesus. Come." Then something happened. She came home.

Her heart slowly began to open. She took up songs again, took up faith. She danced around our home with youthful, spirited, faithful energy. Slowly, she began to claim a "future, with hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). She began to eat the bread again, to drink the wine. She started wondering once more about the world. She started committing herself to it again.

A summer ago, I asked what brought about the change. "Well, Mom," she said. "It was your love—and, I suppose, God."

I suppose God.

The God who led her, an Advent later, to walk into worship, Lucia's crown on her forehead, children round her feet, joy in her heart. The God who led her, that Advent season, to ask to light the pink candle on the log, and by the way, also the white one, in the middle.

The God who will come again in Christ to make all things new—even as Advent professes—and along the way, in daily life, makes that promise not only a future work.

The Rev. Karen Bates-Olson is pastor at Lutheran Church of the Master in Pasco, Wash. She and her husband, Kevin, are blessed with two beautiful daughters: Amy Carol, 17, and Katie Ann, 12.

## N<sub>0</sub>

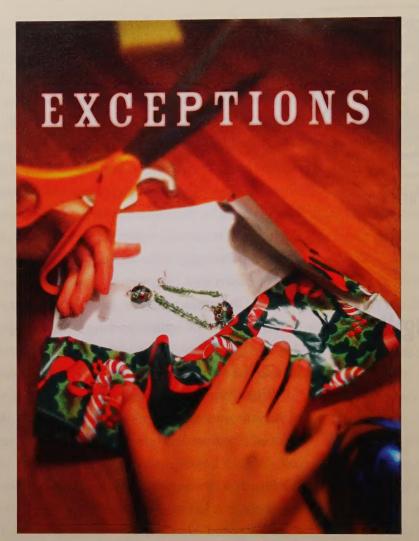
by Angie Shannon

The holiday season always conjures up nostalgic images of family, gift giving, and gift receiving. You see, I hail from one of the largest families in my home town of Gary, Indiana.

Granddaddy and Grandmama Shannon lived in a modest Sears and Roebuck house. When my extended family was smaller, myriad relatives would pile into their living room to celebrate Christmas and exchange gifts.

As a child, my grandparent's home was grander than any mansion; it was like a palace to me. It never felt crowded but in my adult backward glance, there was no way that tiny house could not have been packed! There was always great food and laughter. Especially at Christmas time.

One of my fondest Christmas memories with my grandparents was receiving my first piece of "real" birthstone jewelry from Aunt Louise. That signaled to the world that I was no longer a little girl. At the grand age of seven, I joined ranks of my "big girl" cousins.



We are a family of great humor and fabulous storytellers. Even today, it starts when someone asks, "Remember when?" We start to regale each other for hours with tall tales. Some of those stories taught us what constitutes proper behavior as a child of God and a descendant of Sadie and Nathaniel Shannon Sr.

If you did something wrong, my family swiftly loved you back into shape. Thereafter, little was spoken of your infraction. However, if you did something outrageously funny, you could never live it down. Members of my family never tire of

laughing at ourselves. With 34 first cousins, there is plenty of fodder for great stories. And some of them are epic!

#### SPECIAL GIFTS

A favorite story in my family's collection is about my cousin Rita. She is one of the funniest and smartest people I know. When she was about four years old, she decided that she would give her parents and siblings gifts for Christmas. She lit up when she told them, "Ooooo, you are really going like your gift. It's something you really want."

Soon gifts began to appear inderneath the Christmas tree. That was back in the day when our-year-olds had no money! How and where was she getting these fifts? Aunt Louise thought Uncle teke took her shopping. Uncle teke thought Rita had gone shopping with Aunt Louise.

Perhaps she made gifts in prechool. Who knew? With all the inthusiasm a four-year-old could muster, Rita gleefully wrapped each backage with care. As more gifts appeared, little items began to go missing—a nail file, a bottle of nail bolish, a favorite pair of earrings, a mecktie or two. Aunt Louise thought a strange, but she figured those things had been misplaced. That mappens often in large families, so there was little cause for concern.

Finally, on Christmas morning, when the family began to open the lifts from Rita, they discovered that these "gifts" were things they really iked and wanted! After all, the gifts the had selected belonged to them in the first place. They celebrated Rita's thoughtfulness, creativity, and laughed themselves to tears! They could not wait to share what became one of the best Christmases they ever had with the rest of us.

#### IFTS FOR ALL

The Sears and Roebuck house has een sold. The patriarch and matrirch have joined the great cloud of witnesses. Rita has children of her own. Now, we gather our even larger extended family at a pavilion several days after Christmas to exchange gifts and retell Rita's story among many others.

The gifts under Rita's Christmas tree were things that each of her family members already possessed and liked.

In a similar manner, we already have our spiritual gifts. It is up to us to unwrap and share them with the world. Popular religious imagination has led us to believe that spiritual gifts are granted exclusively to an elite group of Christians who merit them. Nothing could be further from the truth! A gift by definition is a grace. It is unearned, undeserved, and freely given to each of us by God who is love.

St. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone."

I think the word everyone has been lost on most of Christendom. Even we good Lutherans, the doctrinal champions of sola gratia—by grace alone—seem to have missed this point. Everyone has spiritual gifts, no exceptions.

Since every good and generous gift comes from God, all gifts are

spiritual! St. Paul reminds us that God gives us spiritual gifts for "the common good." Unlike, the gifts we give one another, we are to share our spiritual gifts to edify or build up our collective lives in Christ and the world.

The Pauline letters have various gift lists (see Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4). His lists are not exhaustive because God is always doing a new thing with and through us.

#### GIFTS OF GENEROSITY

Everyday saints are amazing because they go about their daily lives, almost imperceptibly doing good for others, reflecting God's glory and by their example leading others to Christ.

The stories of Oceola McCarty and Grace Groner come to mind. Their lives and stories have left the world a better place and inspired generosity in countless others. In 1995, at 87, Oceola McCarty, a washerwoman with a sixth-grade education astounded many by establishing a need-based scholarship at the University of Southern Mississippi with a gift of \$150,000, which was her life savings-after she gave a tithe to her church, of course! She received a Presidential Citizen's Award from the Clinton administration for her selfless giving.

In January 2010, Grace Groner died at the age of 100, leaving her

alma mater, Lake Forest College, \$7 million. Neither woman commanded much attention in daily life—no blinding camera flashes from paparazzi—nor did they call much attention to themselves.

Although they were frugal, they were not misers. Both were active in their churches and were known (only to a select few) to give anonymous gifts when people found themselves in need. Miss McCarty could barely read, but she knew how to serve, save, and share. Miss Groner bought three shares of a pharmaceutical company in 1935 and parlayed that into a fortune that she gave away so students could expand their minds through international study.

Each woman had the gift of generosity and God leavened that gift far beyond anyone's imaginings or expectations. Granted Oceola McCarty and Grace Groner are extraordinary examples, but each child of God has a unique gift to offer the world. Whether you have any of the remarkable gifts that apostle Paul speaks of in his epistles or a modest one, all gifts are significant in God's economy.

#### IDENTIFYING OUR GIFTS

My three-year-old niece, Lydia, has cerebral palsy and is missing significant portions of her brain. Doctors and health care professionals told her parents that she would never talk or interact with them on any meaningful level.

Yet, Lydia has spiritual gifts. She has a one-word vocabulary. She can say "hi!" and wave, too. Mind you, it takes Lydia about 90 seconds to get that little hand in the air to wave. Her focus and determination is admirable. Lydia loves to smile and lately has learned to laugh. By worldly standards, Lydia does not have much, but what she has she shares freely. I have seen her smile lift the spirits of the brokenhearted. It was an awe-inspiring, holy moment.

Somewhere between two generous women leaving their fortunes to institutions of higher learning and a little girl with cerebral palsy are your spiritual gifts.

How can you identify them?

My young cousin Rita carefully observed the members of her family to determine what they liked so she would select just the right "gift" for each one of them.

Finding your spiritual gifts takes self-awareness and understanding of your passions. What do you like to do? Where do you see God calling you?

Noted theologian Frederick Buechner speaks about passions, callings, or vocations in this way: "It is where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need."

This is not a rallying cry to go chase windmills but rather to enter

a process of prayer and mindfulness. Where does your deep gladness touch the world's deep need?

In prayer, ask God to reveal your spiritual gifts to you. Covenant with another Christian to help you identify them. Spiritual gifts inventories can provide insight but your Bible study group will yield the greatest help.

The Holy Spirit will assist the community of faith in helping you identify your unique spiritual gifts and graces.

Those churchwomen who prepare funeral luncheons for bereaved families would be astounded to find out that their loving service is a spiritual gift. The sexton who sees to it that all things are in order Sunday after Sunday is sharing the spiritual gift of service. The person who can speak a word to lift a heavy heart shares the gift of encouragement and exhortation. That neighbor who mows your grass or shovels your walk is expressing a spiritual gift of kindness.

Each prayer, each act of service, each act of generosity offered is a spiritual gift. Every act of kindness is a spiritual gift motivated by Divine love.

As you unwrap gifts this Christmas, don't forget to thank God for the spiritual gifts that are already yours in Christ Jesus.

The Rev. Angie Shannon is an ELCA pastor and writer.



ET US PRAY

## The Bread of Life

y Julie K. Aageson

Eucharistic prayer from Renewing forship: Holy Communion and Related ites, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 002.

## For many of us, bread

is a staple of life. Among my earliest memories of home is the unforgettable smell of freshly baked bread. I loved its taste and beauty, the variety of its shapes and sizes, and the way it signified something more than nourishment. When I learned to make bread myself, I liked experimenting with my mother's best recipes: *jule kaga* (Swedish sweet bread), orange rolls, Swedish rye, and more. Most of all, it was deeply gratifying to offer bread to others, to share the bounty, to break bread together.

In this season of Advent, we wait for the coming of Christ, the Bread of Life. Thinking of the Christ child's birth-place—in Bethlehem, a Hebrew word meaning *house of bread*—I am filled with wonder at the deeper meanings of what Christ's coming is about.

Is Jesus truly the Bread of Life? What does it mean that Jesus comes to us in a manger used as a feedbox for animals or that we place his birth in a small town named house of bread? What does it mean that we receive Christ's body in the form of bread and wine or that we are called to be the body of Christ, bread for the world? Is Christianity about food and drink? What does Jesus have to do with hunger? Can hunger be both physical and spiritual?

There is something primal and basic about bread. Whether tortillas or lefse, bread is connected to the longing we all have to eat and be satisfied.

In the same way, Jesus-and all we believe Jesus to be-is bread for our lives.

His life and his death are about feeding one another, caring for one another, inviting one another to feast on the Bread of Life.

In the parables he taught and in the life he lived, we see this Jesus to be bread for the world incarnate in each of us. He comes to us and through us, nourishing our bodies as well as our souls, asking us to be bread for the world.

May the Bread of Life who comes to us at Christmastime find a place at our tables, in our mangers, in our homes. And may we who have bread in abundance share that Bread of Life beyond our own tables, our own communities, and our own kind. May we truly be the body of Christ in the world.

Holy God, our Bread of Life, our table and our food,

You created a world in which all might be satisfied by your abundance.

You dined with Abraham and Sarah, promising them life,

And you fed your people, Israel, with manna from heaven.

You sent your Son to eat with sinners and to become bread for the world.

Be with us now!

Nourish and sustain us . . .

Strengthen us to serve all in hunger and want,

And make of us the body of Christ for the world.

Amen\*

Julie K. Aageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.

## MORE THAN A NUMBER

every 9.5 minutes, someone in the United States is infected with HIV

12,000,000 children under the age of 18 in sub-Saharan Africa have lost one or both parents to AIDS

25,000,000 people have died from AIDS-related illnesses

more than 33,000,000 people are living with HIV or AIDS in our world today

we are all 1 in the body of Christ

#### MY FRIEND ROSA IS ONE OF THE NUMBERS.

She's one of the 33 million people living with HIV. She lives in Colombia, and is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Colombia. In July 2010, she was one of several participants at the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, who shared her story of how HIV and AIDS has impacted her life. Rosa represents one story, one person, but she isn't just a number or a statistic. Rosa is a wife, a mother, a daughter, and an active member of her church. She is a fellow member of the body of Christ. She is HIV-positive and

> has been since she was a little girl.

The ELCA strategy on HIV and AIDS affirms the claim made and shared by the Lutheran World Federation: the body of Christ has AIDS. Paul wrote about the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12, describing it as interconnected and interdependent, with each member having value, gifts, and functions. In verse 26 he wrote: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored,

all rejoice together with it."

The strategy reflects on what this means for the ELCA as it begins to understand itself as a part of the body of Christ with AIDS. That is, seeing ourselves as an HIV-

positive church. Part of what that means is that Rosa is not alone. She lives in another country, with different challenges and experiences than some of us have, yet we are united with her in faith-which means in both her joys and her sorrows, including her HIV-positive status. We are united with her in the body of Christ. When she suffers, we suffer. When she is honored, we all rejoice.

#### THE CHURCH IS CALLED

A strategy may not sound personal, but it does help our church put a person, a face on the pandemic that HIV and AIDS is in the world, including in the United States. The document helps us as a church to set some goals for our ministry around HIV and AIDS:

"With over 4.7 million members and more than 10,400 congregations in the United States, in addition to relationships with 68.3 million more Lutherans worldwide, the ELCA has the potential to contribute in ways proportionate to its wealth, size, and assets, to the following goals of the wider human community:

- > Halt the spread of HIV through effective prevention, treatment, and care.
- > Eliminate the stigma and discrimination experienced by those who are HIV-positive.
- > Reduce the conditions of poverty and marginalization that contribute to the spread of HIV."

The ELCA's strategy is organized in six sections that identify key areas for response



by a church that is in the midst of the HIV and AIDS crisis, and so is HIV-positive. The key areas to which the church is called:

- to biblical and theological reflection in community.
- > to effective prevention, treatment, and care.
- to eradicate stigma and discrimination.
- to walk with companion churches and partners in other countries.
- > to advocate for justice.
- to build institutional capacity and make strategic choices.

These are goals and key areas for strategic response that many of us affirm, but after hearing and reading about them even briefly, our eyes may begin to glaze over and we lose track of why the church's work with HIV and AIDS is important, of why the strategy matters.

It matters to me because of Rosa, and women like her. Adopted by the ELCA Church Council in March 2009, the strategy notes that a growing percentage of the current infections in the United States are among heterosexual women and children, particularly of African American or Latino descent.

Each person has a story; some of these stories may be similar to that of their global sister, Rosa. All of the stories remind us of one of the goals of the strategy: eliminate stigma and discrimination experienced by those who are HIV-positive.

#### LEADING BY EXAMPLE

In these initial months of implementing the strategy, efforts are being made toward the goal of eliminating stigma and discrimination. An example of this is a video that was produced in conjunction with National AIDS Testing Day on June 27. The video features St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wheaton, Ill., and their commitment, as they say in the video, to "lead by example." For members of that congregation, this meant being tested themselves so they would be a witness to the importance of knowing one's own HIV and AIDS status. The people of St. Paul decided to make an effort toward reducing stigma and discrimination by making getting tested something they could all do-as a part of their congregation's health fair. And more than that, they were open to telling the story in a video message for the rest of the church. Both young and old members wanted to make a difference, to do something that counted.

The ELCA Conference of Bishops also participated in HIV and AIDS testing at their meeting in spring 2009. They did this for two reasons: to stand in solidarity with global companions who are speaking out about the devastating impact of HIV and AIDS in their countries and to lead by example in their ELCA synods here in the United States.

This is leadership by example that we can all follow and model ourselves. To know your HIV status involves getting a blood test, or a mouth swab, from a local physician or county health office.

Offering HIV screenings in the community-and encouraging everyone to participate-reduces the stigma around testing. When testing is promoted for everyone (as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control), and not just for "high-risk" individuals, then no one needs to feel ashamed or embarrassed about being screened for HIV. No community is immune from HIV-you never know when creating a safe space for voluntary HIV screening and counseling just might save someone's life by giving them the opportunity to know their status, seek treatment and avoid transmitting HIV to someone else.

These examples of how individuals—on their own, within their congregation, or as leaders—have stepped out of the statistics about HIV and AIDS and into the stories because of their desire to be counted among those seeking to bring this pandemic to an end.

#### AN UNSPOKEN SERMON

I was traveling with several ELCA Global Mission colleagues in south-

ern Africa in the fall of 2009, visitng ministries that our companion churches have developed to help hose with HIV and AIDS. We visted a small community in Malawi where the church had organized a ree daily meal for people living in he area. Many of the people there ive in poverty, so this meal was critically important to their health. A number of the children eating here had been orphaned by AIDS. Their mothers and/or fathers had contracted AIDS and died, leaving hem without a parent to raise them and care for them. In some cases, AIDS had deprived them of many family members.

Often, adults are called on to be guardians for children orphaned by AIDS. To be a guardian means assuming responsibility for another child and bringing him or her into their home—where quite likely they didn't have enough food or other necessities to go around as it was. Now another face was added to the family picture, or perhaps two more faces, or four, as the number

of children in this predicament continues to grow. Yet the guardians I met had formed a choir and sang joyously for their vistors about how God had blessed them through the children in their care.

A small boy, maybe ive or six years old, was

one of those orphans. Something made him seem open to me, a stranger who stepped out of a vehicle and into his world, even though I was clearly different than nearly everyone there. That little boy took my hand almost as soon as I got out of the vehicle. (See his photo on p. 11.) He stayed by my side throughout the visit. He didn't talk to me, nor did he understand what I said to him. But his presence with me spoke volumes. He was pretty young to be such an eloquent preacher.

His unspoken "sermon" was about the power of one person, a shared faith in one God, and a common goal about one disease. His small hand in mine reminded me that we don't work against HIV and AIDS alone—we work hand-in-hand with global partners and increasingly with partners in the United States. His presence reminded me of the core message of the ELCA HIV and AIDS strategy: the body of Christ has AIDS. We are an HIV-positive church. We will strive to be an HIV-competent

church through living out the HIV and AIDS strategy.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

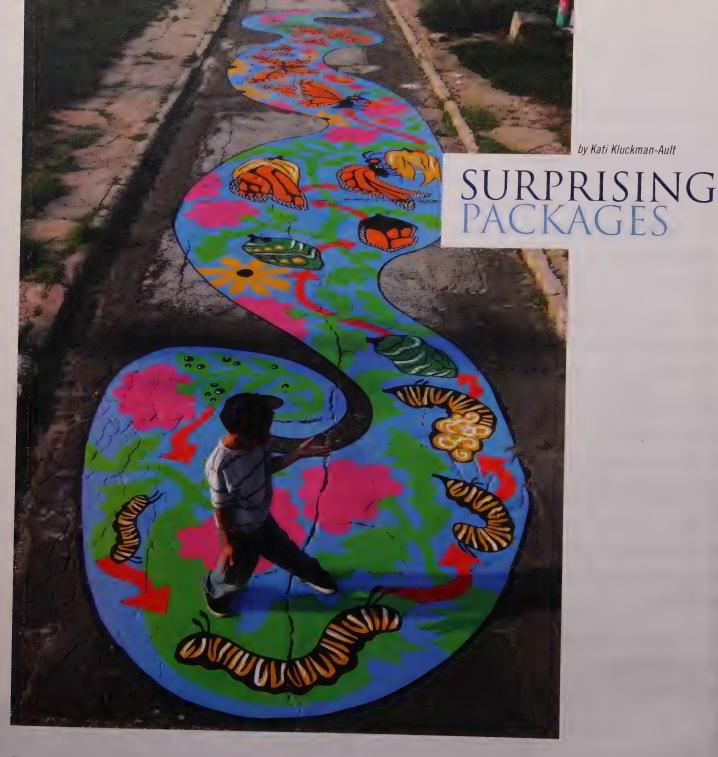
As a church, I believe we'll engage this ministry ever more intensely because of the statistics, yes, but also because we know the Rosas, the children of Africa who are orphaned, and those friends and family members who live with HIV and AIDS in this country. Most importantly, we'll implement our HIV and AIDS strategy because we are part of the body of Christ. When one member suffers, we all suffer. When one rejoices, we all rejoice.

Visit www.elca.org/aids to learn more about the ELCA strategy on HIV and AIDS. Prayerfully consider how you will lead people in your congregation and community to take action.

Each one of us can be more than a number or a statistic. We can make a difference.

The Rev. Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl is coordinator of the ELCA Malaria Campaign and the HIV and AIDS Strategy of the ELCA.

DECEMBER 1 IS WORLD AIDS DAY, a day to raise awareness and money and remember the people affected by the pandemic. To learn more about the ELCA's HIV and AIDS strategy and find resources (including worship materials) go to www.elca.org/aids.



I have a friend who re-gifts. When she receives a gift she believes isn't quite right for her, she graciously says "thank you" to the giver. Later she places the gift in a large box that contains other gifts she has received over the years that weren't quite

right. When the time comes for her to give a gift, this box of re-gifts is the first place she looks. I don't know how she keeps track of all the gifts to prevent giving a gift back to its original giver. Perhaps she has a system.

The reality is that in life, the giving and receiving of gifts can be more complicated than the words giving and receiving. We have so many occasions that can involve giving and receiving: holidays, birthdays, and baby showers.

But aside from special occaions, in the midst of busy lives, to we always notice when we have given or received a gift? True gifts are more than what we find in beauifully wrapped packages. As followers of Jesus, aren't we invited to ecceive the gift of God's grace to us? Our life together as a community is formed by the power of God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

So, how is it that we receive God's gifts to us—especially the ones that come through others? And how do we live into the confidence that God has, in turn, gifted others through us?

Through the life, death, and esurrection of Jesus Christ, we are alled (individually and as a community) into a life that not only gives us the gifts of God—salvation and new life—but also changes us not a force that can transform the world. Don't we pray almost every lay, your kingdom come?

Luther reminds us in the Small Catechism that God's kingdom loes indeed come even without our brayer, but that we are praying that will come to us as well.

One of our greatest challenges may be in seeing how we ourselves become part of how and where God's kingdom comes into the world. It is, after all, in our daily fe together that God's kingdom is wed out. It's easy in the midst of our complicated lives to overlook

where God is giving gifts and where God's kingdom is coming true.

#### The Givers and The Receivers

For the past nine years, I have served an inner-city multicultural congregation aptly named Amazing Grace. The membership is mixed in many ways-crossing all kinds of boundaries that separate us in our culture-racial, economic, and geographical to name a few. At first glance, one might be tempted to think that it would be easy to separate the givers from the receivers in this congregation. Those who have the gifts of education, economic resources, or good health could be seen as the gifted ones. Those who are struggling financially, have had significant battles with mental health or addiction, or those who are unable to read well might be seen as the ones who receive.

One member at Amazing Grace stands out as someone who taught me much about giving and receiving. This is a woman whose life has been complicated by long-held grief, significant economic deprivation, and complicated life relationships. She complains often, tells the same stories again and again, and is often very angry at the people in her life.

It took me years to see the extraordinary and significant gift that this woman brings to the congregation. I watched her arrive one

Sunday morning: She took her usual place and began to read the bulletin from cover to cover. After that, she began to mark every hymn and Bible reading for that day. As she prepared herself for worship, I realized that this woman does not miss a worship opportunity. Her testimony to her God given gift is spoken in her faithfulness at worship.

She comes every Sunday she possibly can; she does not miss a Lenten or special service. In spite of the many difficulties in her life, this woman finds that gathering with her brothers and sisters in worship is so important that even after relocating, she walked several miles to come to *this* congregation. I have been humbled by her faithful prayer requests during healing prayer and, somehow, this congregation feels less than complete when she is missing from her usual pew.

#### **Hidden Gifts**

It was easy to overlook this woman as one with gifts to offer because she also is one with great needs. One of the wonders of God's gift of grace is that through God's work in us, we are changed so that we are both giver and receiver of gifts. Our temptation is to focus on one over the other—and to miss the richness of the inter-relationships that connect us in our giving and receiving.

In the years that I have served at Amazing Grace, I have been

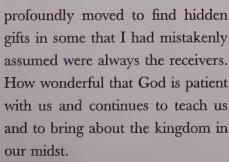
From Amazing Grace
Lutheran Church in Baltimore:
The Amazing Port Street sacred
space found behind the church,
with a prayer labyrinth,
vegetable and flower gardens,
and peace poles, all seeking to
bring God's healing and grace to
the brokenness of our lives, the
community, and all creation.











Another way that God's king-dom comes alive is when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes and hearts to how mixed up we are in this giving and receiving. No one brings nothing and everyone can receive. When we are offered the opportunity to live in ways that do not conform to the vision of this world, God is giving us the chance to see ourselves

and each other as God sees us—as God's own beloved children who carry along gifts, flaws, sin, and grace. In our journey of discipleship, as we follow Jesus day by day, we are transformed by the renewing of our minds through the grace of God.

#### **Bound Together**

I often find myself reflecting on the question, "What difference does it make that I am a baptized child of God?" Considering that question has taken me to many places on the path of discipleship. When I first arrived at Amazing Grace, I was learning how to be a parish nurse.

I was sure that there would be so much for me to do there because this was such a needy area of the city. Besides, I had been a nurse for 25 years—surely I was the gifted one. I was certain I had much to give to the people who lived in the inner city and who had so many needs. After nine years, I am blessed to say that I have received as much or more than I have ever given.

I have learned that God's gifts come in surprising packages—in neighborhood children who give me thank-you notes for the afterschool program; in recovering drug addicts who stop by to tell me that hey have been clean for three years nd they soon will have custody of heir children again; in praying with hurch members whose testimony s that no matter what the circumtances, God has always brought hem through.

I have learned that if I ignore the rifts of those around me, I decline God's building up of the kingdom nd the offer of grace, forgiveness, nd mercy that comes through my isters and brothers.

Perhaps one thing we are to learn on our journey is the broadness of God's mercy and love that comes hrough the uncountable ways in vhich we are bound together in God's grace-both with our gifts nd with our needs.

#### mprobable Sources

One of Amazing Grace's outreach ninistries was a weekly spirituality roup at a nearby hospital program or young pregnant women who vere also recovering addicts. The ives of these young women were illed with the stresses of unplanned oregnancies, learning to live sober, nd the complicated relationships hat surrounded them.

One part of our outreach was a veekly Bible study with the women who were newly admitted to the rogram. They were often in the nidst of detoxing from street drugs. They were embarrassed to be there, hysically uncomfortable, and frustrated with the obstacles they were dealing with. Yet in the middle of this 30-minute study time together, God's Spirit was present in ways that brought many gifts into the very midst of our group to bless and benefit everyone-the leaders and the participants.

One day, we were reflecting together on the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). In verse 20 it says, "But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him." I asked the participants how it happened to be that the father was out there so that he saw his son walking near on that particular day. One of the women looked at me as if I was the simplest person she'd ever met. She said, with a hint of impatience, "Because the father went out there every day to watch for his son."

How many times had I heard this story in Sunday school, confirmation class, and worship? Yet in this moment, sitting in a locked ward with recovering drug addicts, I was given a glimpse into the power of God's greatest gift-God's persistent love for each of us. Who would know better our need for God's grace than a woman going through many struggles-with drug addiction and with preparing for an unexpected baby?

In that moment, I received a gift that changed that story for me forever. And I received God's gift through someone most people would consider an improbable source. I learned that God's gifts are all around us, in us, among us.

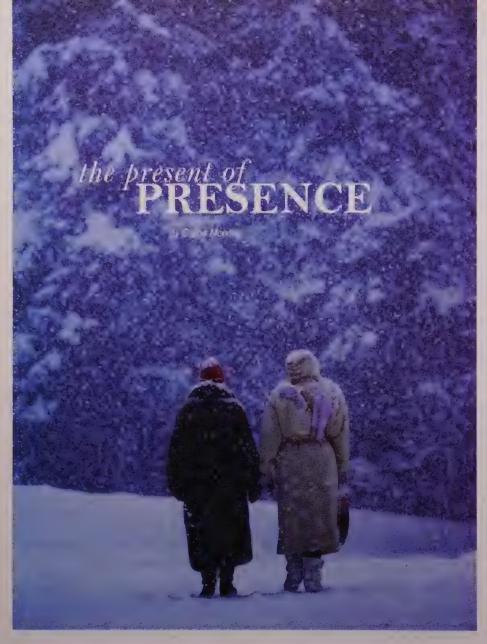
We often miss God's grace-full gifts when we can't imagine or we ignore all of the places where God might gift and re-gift us. God does not give up on us. God continues to be at work in us as we are brought together as the body of Christ, where we receive God's mercy and forgiveness through God's gracefull work in each of us.

When we are unable to see ourselves and each other as gifted, beloved children of God, we deny the wonderful possibilities that God desires for us and our communities of faith.

God's kingdom does indeed come. Our prayer is that we might be open to the ways that God's kingdom is present in each of us now-ways that are sometimes very surprising and unpredictable.

Let us pray every day that we may receive God's gifts and that we may share God's gifts, so that the God's grace and God's kingdom will be lived out.

**Deaconess Kati Kluckman-Ault** now serves as the director for evangelical mission and assistant to the bishop in the Delaware Maryland Synod of the ELCA. She lives in Baltimore with her husband and three children and is a member of the Lutheran Deaconess Conference.



And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24–25)

We're fast approaching Christmas, the celebration of God's gift of incarnation in Jesus Christ. It's also a time of gift giving, so let's consider ways we might mirror God's love for the world by giving the gift

of *ourselves* this year. When asked, most of us might say that spending time with those we love would be the best gift we could receive. In our fast-paced society, time and attention are precious.

Consider opportunities where a present of your presence might touch a loved one's heart. The real gift is the conversation and laughter you enjoy as you spend time together.

You might consider crafting a "coupon" for the occasion, at Christmas or any other time throughout the year. All it takes is a generous imagination and a full heart.

#### ONE ANOTHERING

Deep within us is the desire to be valued for who we are and what we do best. One way to regard our presence as a gift is to remind ourselves: This is who I am and what I bring to our relationship, and I know you, gifted in different ways, will complete who we are together. This mutual celebration of gifts and how we use them to show love, compassion, and encouragement can be called one anothering.

A neighbor once knocked on my door carrying a cocktail dress in one hand and a large bucket of plants in the other. She needed the dress hemmed and thought I might like some of the perennials she had just dug from her garden. We marked the dress for the alterations, set it aside, and went out to the yard. I appreciated her expertise in selecting the best locations for the transplanted flowers. In no time, the plants were in the ground. We had a lovely conversation over coffee as I worked on hemming the

lress. It was an unexpected-but eautiful-addition to my day. Later t prompted me to offer to help a hurch friend paint her bathroom if he'd teach me to make her perfect neringues.

#### BEING FULLY PRESENT

The year my youngest daughter graduated from college and before he started her new job, she asked ne if there was something special would like to do on my birthday. had recently read about a state park with incredible hiking trails and scenic overlooks. So we went. The park surpassed the magazine's lescription. We had a wonderful lay and took loads of great picures. The gift of that occasion was not only in the beauty of the trails and waterfalls-it was that I could pend an entire day with someone I ove at a major turning point in her ife. It was magical!

My daughter's gift to me was hat she was fully present. If she had mything weighing on her mind, it vasn't evident in our conversations and laughter. Jesus told the disciples is they traveled throughout the vilages of Galilee and Judea, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there intil you leave the place" (Mark 6:10). The disciples were to be ully present and centered in their nission among the people there. To honor the sacredness of a relaionship is to slow down and savor

the words, smiles, tastes, tears, and unspoken nudging of the heart that binds us in that moment.

#### AT A TIME OF SADNESS OR LOSS

Being fully present is even more critical when someone we love is dealing with loss. At those times, we often feel inadequate to offer the words of comfort or encouragement. We forget that a hug or a touch on the arm communicates the words of our heart. Our capacity to listen is what is needed. The art of being an attentive listener is at the heart of our encounters with others. In Understanding Your Grief, author Alan Wolfelt uses the word companioning to paint a picture of a meaningful relationship. He writes:

- · Companioning is about walking alongside; it is not about leading.
- Companioning is about being still; it is not about frantic movement forward.
- Companioning is about listening with the heart; it is not about analyzing with the head.
- · Companioning is about being present to another person's pain; it is not about somehow taking away the pain.

My friend Bonnie is the kind of person who says "Call me anytime day or night" and means it. A neighbor took Bonnie's offer to

heart when her husband's declining mental health necessitated a trip to the hospital for psychiatric care. The neighbor asked Bonnie to ride with them to the hospital two hours away and "just listen to him." In the car, Bonnie's presence as a listener allowed her friend to focus on the driving and emotionally prepare herself for the days to come. At the hospital, Bonnie's presence allowed her friend to maneuver through the admittance procedures and to talk to the staff without distraction. The ride back home was an opportunity for Bonnie to be a fully present listener for her neighbor at one of life's most uncertain times.

#### **SPONTANEITY AND** INTENTIONALITY

We need to be open to the opportunities to practice the ministry of presence at short notice. A new member of our quilting group told us that she was leaving a little early to visit a new fabric store in a nearby town. I asked if she'd mind if I'd tagged along. I risked appearing pushy and I hoped she'd trust me enough to feel comfortable declining my request if it wasn't convenient. As it turned out, we had a pleasing trip to the shop and it was the beginning of a growing friendship.

At other times, it is necessary to think ahead and boldly offer your presence well in advance:

- to help the bride-to-be and her mother with wedding details;
- to offer a mom-to-be an afternoon of rest by inviting her other children to your house to bake cookies;
- to weed the garden, dust, or change the bed linens when a friend is planning for out-oftown guests;
- to be willing to open your home for overnight visiting choirs or global companions.

All these examples of helping hands offer opportunity for conversation and nurturing relationships.

My "magical mystery tours" have become famous among my friends. I watch the local newspapers and online newsletters for free admission to events or for open houses. I consider who among my family, friends, or acquaintances would most enjoy sharing that activity. I invite them, but I won't tell what the activity is. Adults are often so mired in over-planning that my mystery offer is rarely refused! I tell them when and where and what kind of clothing would be appropriate.

A few of the ideas I've tried: a walking tour of neighborhood gardens; the county historical society's tours of barns or schoolhouses; berry picking and farmers markets; an adventure at dusk in a corn maze; a high school performing arts presentation; classes in French cooking

or selling things on eBay sponsored by the local library; a road trip to my top six resale shops and used book stores; a day in Woodstock, Ill. (where the movie "Groundhog Day" was filmed) for the annual groundhog festival.

Planning these magical mystery tours is a delight for me because I have my companions in my mind. Thinking about spending time with them makes me smile as I plan a picnic lunch or evening meal to match the activity.

#### NOT ALWAYS IN PERSON

We can't always be with those we hold dear but there are ways to maintain an emotional connection by putting the power of ritual into our relationships. In this case, it began with a single sheet of construction paper.

During my first year of college I decided to mark the four years that my dearest friend and I would be separated by making her a birthday card. I cut out a cute picture from a magazine, pasted it on the construction paper, and wrote a short birthday greeting. I invited her to add something to the page and send it back to me on my birthday. This ritual has long outlasted those college years and that constructionpaper card (now six pages long!) has become a more treasured reflection of a lifelong friendship than any other gift could ever be.

When she was young, my daughter met a playmate while we were camping and they vowed to write one another after the vacation. Megan adopted my birthday card idea and she and her friend have watched their card cross the country twice a year for some 25 years now. The connection that these hand-decorated greetings have become is a source of encouragement, support, and love.

Consider creative ways you can stay emotionally connected despite the hurdle of distance:

- agree to stop and pray for one another at a specific time of day;
- plan for regular telephone or Web-based conversations;
- agree to read the same book, watch the same movie or try the same recipe and then e-mail one another about it.

We have many ways to give a gift that is more meaningful than something from a mall. Your present of presence can be a treasured memory without spending a lot of money or contributing to the usual over-consumption of material things (many of which eventually end up in a landfill). This Christmas, follow God's example—give the gift of yourself.

**Diane Monroe** is former ELCA director for Christian Education.



the gift that keeps on giving!

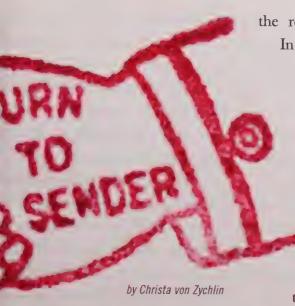
## Women ELCA

Yearly subscriptions to *Lutheran Woman Today* are a great way to share your faith with friends and family. Participate in our award-winning Bible Study together all year long. Call **800.328.4648** or visit us online at **www.lutheranwomantoday.org**.

Just \$12 a year for 10 issues,







One day my recently empty-nested neighbor came home from a long lay of work only to be greeted by a golden retriever, knocking her over vith great licks of the tongue.

Her kids had gotten together and decided she needed someone to keep her company. So they did some esearch and headed for the animal helter, where they were amazed to ind a beautiful, enthusiastic, adult etriever needing a home.

"But did I ever say that I wanted a big dog in my life?" my neighoor said, shaking her head. The log would mean extra work, extra xpense, extra trouble. But over the ext decade, taking care of, and exercising that dog produced a lot of joy, love, kindness, and faithfulless in my neighbor's life.

Now we all know that you hould never, ever, give a living reature to someone as a pet unless ou are absolutely sure they have

the resources to devote to it. In this case, my neighbor's kids really knew what they were doing.

> It seems to me that God's spiritual gifts have something in common with my neighbor's unexpected new companion.

Sometimes people are "blessed" with spiritual gifts they would never have chosen for themselves.

#### Gifts with Challenges

For example, Beth, one of the parents of our church youth group, had the gift of relating to teenagers. She was a tall, strikingly beautiful woman, with an amazing ability to converse enthusiastically about the latest and greatest in teenage music, fashion, and video games with one breath, and in the next breath challenge kids in small group conversations about how God might be speaking to them to put their faith into action in practical, everyday ways.

After another youth night in which some of us older parents looked on in awe, thankfulness, and maybe a tinge of jealousy, I was surprised when Beth came to me nearly shaking: "I really need to talk to you-Becca just asked me to be her confirmation mentor." "And the problem is?" I asked, wondering what could ever faze this smart,

competent woman. "The problem is that annual banquet when each of the mentors has to stand in front of everybody and say something about their student . . . and I absolutely cannot speak in front of crowds!"

I would have laughed at her except that the terror in her eyes told me she was speaking the truth. If she could possibly have given her gift of youth ministry back to God right then and there, she would have done it.

So what do we do when our spiritual gifts conflict with one or more of our natural inclinations or limitations? Ask God for a trade-in?

A nurse might think, "I'd like to trade two cups of compassion and helping for just one cup of powerful healing," and yet the family members of one of her patients may know that compassion and helping is sometimes worth more than even a physical healing.

Or I can almost hear the prayers of a woman who's organized the leadership retreat for the third successful year in a row, planning the program, answering e-mails, fielding phone calls, and reassuring speakers who have last minute multi-media requirements: "You can take my gift of administration back a-a-anytime, Lord. Anytime."

The end of Beth's story is a happy one-she did go on to mentor the girl who asked her. At the end-of-the year banquet, Beth gave a very short, very heart-felt tribute. Two years later she did it again, and she's mentoring a third young woman this year. I don't think her end-of-the-year tributes will ever win any eloquence prizes, but her short, nervous public speeches have become quite popular with kids and parents alike. They show that she's human like the rest of us. She's not perfect, but she's real.

#### Gifts in the Family

Another dilemma occurs when family members have spiritual gifts which aren't broadly shared by their nearest and dearest. For example, I married someone with a generous dose of the gift of hospitality. My husband will invite people over with nary a thought of whether our kitchen floor has been swept in the past month or not.

In the early years of our marriage this was tough on our relationship, especially since I had come from a family where having people over was a rare and anxious event. My whole family would go into emergency mode, scouring the bathroom, roaring the vacuum, fretting whether there was enough food and would the recipe turn out, and why do we only have five matching water glasses? For my husband, however, it didn't matter if there were pans in the sink or my bra draped on the hook in the bathroom. "Come on

in!" I'd hear him say, spontaneously ushering in some new neighbors, or a church council member, or the meter reader who was in dire need of a drink of water.

It helped our marriage when I came to see my husband's "thought-lessness" as a superabundance of the gift of hospitality. While I would gladly have handed my husband's special gift right back to the One who gave it to him, in time he's learned to check in with me before issuing most invitations.

I, in turn, have learned to appreciate the wide variety of people we've been able to entertain over the years and the stories we and our children have been privileged to hear. It's so true what the writer of the book of Hebrews says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

My husband, for his part, has had to put up with my wide streak of the gift of generosity. It's true, and it can be obnoxious: I like to give things away. When we got married, I was happy to discover we had some duplicate books which we could give to some international students.

"Books? You gave my books away? The ones I underlined and wrote notes in the margins?"

"Well, we still have another copy, and when were you going to look at those books again, anyway?" When we left our first home in order to serve as Lutheran missionaries in the Central African Republic, I was cheerful about distributing our goods to neighbors, friends, and to complete strangers through a series of cheap garage sales.

"My grill?" my husband asked. "You gave away my grill?"

"What do you think, we're going to schlep it to Africa in our barrels? Besides, you should have seen how happy this young couple was to buy it for only two dollars."

I also like giving to our church. "Mom, we could have bought me a car for this money!" one of my teenaged sons once said when he happened to see our giving statement.

"Yep. But then we wouldn't have had the satisfaction of giving it to God's projects," I said. "Besides, doesn't it make you feel rich to know your parents give this much money away?"

No, it did not make him feel rich. But a few years later I noticed this same son putting a surprisingly large bill into the offering plate. Sometimes spiritual gifts can be contagious.

#### Gifts for a Strong Body

The gifts of the Spirit are not for our consumption as individuals, nor even for us as couples and families, but they are like fresh healthy food to build up the strong and beautiful bride of Christ, the church.

Sometimes these gifts, like fresh, ealthy food, can be a little hard for church body to chew.

I don't know many church memers who really and truly appreciate e gift of exhortation (Romans 2:8) for example. What does that ord mean, anyway? It's a fancy ord for giving advice and persuadg people, and sometimes, quite onestly, people with this gift can em rather pushy.

Darlene was a woman at our urch who had been given the ouble gift of faithfulness and thortation to prayer.

Now in our church, many of had long been paying mere lip rvice to prayer. Yes we said, "I'll ay for you!" but during the week e'd forget, and the names on e prayer chain weren't updated, nd then weeks would have gone and someone would suddenly y, "How is so-and-so doing, anyay, I haven't-seen that family for onths!" And we'd all feel a bit bad at we hadn't thought or prayed r them lately.

Darlene took it upon herself change our church's way of ayer. She wanted to start prayer ostcards. Prayer partners. Prayer oups. Articles on prayer in the wsletter. Prayer retreats.

Some folks, including me, eren't terribly grateful for Darne's persistence. Sometimes I dn't like the insinuation that our church wasn't doing much in the prayer department (we weren't, but I didn't like to hear about it). Also, to be honest, many of us felt that Darlene was a bit too assertive. A bit fanatic. A little bit "out there" about prayer.

Then one day a gentle grandmother named Joanne joined our congregation. Joanne had been a pastor's daughter, and maybe that contributed to the way in which God had given her some of the best gifts of encouragement and compassion I'd ever experienced.

Soon Joanne and Darlene were working together on the prayer projects. Darlene's exhortations were softened by Joanne's sensitive and sunny disposition. I could now see why the spiritual gift of compassion has the very interesting corollary of cheerfulness in the Bible: Those who are gifted by the Spirit to be moved by suffering are also empowered to bring cheer and hope into people's lives. This makes sense if you think about it-no one wants a gloomy care-giver . . . or pray-er!

Today, that same church has an exceptionally vibrant prayer ministry, which has expanded into e-prayer updates, prayer shawls, and visitation ministry, all because these two women with their very different gifts, found synergy when they worked together.

Another spiritual gift which can be difficult to appreciate at first encounter is truth-telling, which many scholars regard as the essential ingredient of the biblical gift of prophecy. A church member who stands up and asks for hard facts and figures regarding church worship participation, baptisms, and accounting of money designated for the poor, might be considered a hostile voice at an annual meeting. However, uncovering the clear facts about a slipping rate of baptisms or a mingling of designated funds may be the first essential step of a new direction for a congregation on the path of following Jesus.

Whatever your particular spiritual gift is, it is a gift from the One who has formed you and knows you. While some gifts may seem more obviously attractive than others (who wouldn't rather be a leader than an exhorter, or a healer instead of a prophet?) they are each necessary. The One who has given us the gifts knows us well and exactly. Sometimes it is the most unlikely gifts, the ones we never would have asked for, that result in the most delicious fruit of the Spirit, including love, kindness, and joy. 🤐

The Rev. Christa von Zychlin (http:// marathonangel.blogspot.com) lives, learns, teaches, and occasionally preaches in the great city of Hong Kong, China, where she and her husband, the Rev. Wayne Nieminen, serve as ELCA missionaries(www.elca.org/ missionarysponsorship) with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong.



HEALTH WISE

### Move it, Shake it

by Molly M. Ginty

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

## Valerie C. Smith didn't want to be next.

When she learned that her mother and two of her sisters were on high blood

pressure medication, Smith pledged to avoid their fate and get moving—literally.

"Though I'd never been an athlete, I started running to lower my risk of the hypertension that runs in my family," says Smith, 43, a human resources manager in New York City.

One marathon, 11 years, and the loss of 25 pounds later, Smith has a healthy blood pressure level—and is not only jogging daily, but hitting the gym, too. "I grew to love exercise so much that I now do it two hours a day," she says. "It relaxes me, helps me process my thoughts, and keeps me feeling energetic and happy pretty much all the time."

As Smith's case proves, regular workouts can have bountiful benefits. Studies show that getting 20 to 30 minutes of moderate exercise each day (the minimum recommended by health authorities) wards off deadly disease, lengthens your life, and lifts your spirits—all good reasons to put exercise at the top of your New Year's resolution list.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only half of women in the United States get the 150 minutes of exercise they need per week.

The CDC and other authorities say that as an alternative to 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise (during which it should be possible for you to talk but not sing), you can get 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise (which chall lenges you so much that you can only say a few words without pausing). Thus doing intense, aerobic activity literally cuts your workout time in half.

Moderate exercise includes walking, water aerobics, and doubles tennis Vigorous exercise includes jogging, brisk swimming, and taking a partners dance class. Biking can fall into either category depending on whether you're on flat ground or a steep hill. Whatever form of exercise you choose, strengthening activities that work major muscle groups (such as yoga or weight training) should be included twice a week.

What good comes from all that cycling sprinting, and swimming? According to the American College of Sports Medicine, getting the recommended quota of exercise reduces your risk of stroke by 27 percent; cuts your chances of high blood pressure, heart disease, and Alzheimer's disease by 40 percent; and lowers your risk of breast and colon cancers by 50 to 60 percent. Exercise also helps fend off osteoporosis and arthritis.

If you increase the amount of time you exercise, you'll give your health a bigger boost. A recent Harvard University study found that while most women gain an average 1.5 pounds a year between age 25 and 55, those who exercise at least 60 minutes daily (double the recommended quota) are usually able to maintain a steady weight.

Benefits like these hold true no made ter what age you are when you mount a bicycle or hoist a barbell. According to ne Archives of Internal Medicine, xercising for 30 minutes per day rings a "significantly reduced risk f cognitive impairment" for people wer age 55-and can improve brain unction in people ages 65 to 75.

Even if you have health condiions that limit your exercise rouine (such as arthritis or heart disase), you and your doctor can still levelop a workout plan that's sufcient. You may not be able to run 26-mile marathon, but perhaps

ou can stroll around your neighborood for 26 minutes. You may not be ble sweat it out on a StairMaster, but ou can skip elevator rides and instead aunter up the steps. "Start small, and when you see that you can have success, ou may find that you're ready for the ext challenge," says Judith Hibbard, h.D., a professor of health policy at the Iniversity of Oregon.

"With a little creativity, you can fit xercise into your routine no matter ow busy you are," says Dr. Pamea Peeke, author of Body for Life for Vomen. "If you have an hour-long lunch reak, walk for 30 minutes then spend 0 eating. If you have a 15-minute reak between meetings, walk around our office for 10 minutes of that time." mall, regular chunks of exercise are nough to help you lose weight. But xperts caution that this shouldn't be our main motivation. "Women who re just interested in addressing their reight work out 25 percent less often nan women who exercise for reasons



of wellness," says Michelle Segar, an exercise psychologist at the University of Michigan. "In other words, the most effective motivation is nourishing yourself-and realizing that exercise is essential for your physical, spiritual, and emotional health."

Make workouts a regular part of your routine and you can't help but feel emotionally healthier. Exercise not only reduces your levels of the stress hormone cortisol, but boosts your levels of endorphins, which are the body's natural feel-good chemicals.

"Exercise is better than any mood drug," says Julie Barroukh, 45, who lost 40 pounds after she started exercising a decade ago and is now a professional fitness trainer in Los Angeles. "It calms you down, centers you, and keeps you in an optimistic mood. In short, it's the magic pill that all of us have been looking for."

Molly Ginty (http://mollymaureenginty.wordpress. com) lives in New York. Her work has appeared in Women's eNews, Marie Claire, Redbook, and Ms.

For more information: President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition Fit Facts and Tips www.fitness.gov/resources-andgrants/fit-facts-and-tips

## The Gifts of the Spirit by Linda Johnson Seyenkulo and Jensen Seyenkulo

#### WORSHIP RESOURCES

**ELW** Evangelical Lutheran Worship (also known as the red book)

LBW Lutheran Book of Worship (also known as the green book)

**WOV** With One Voice (also known as the blue book)

TFF This Far By Faith (also known as the African American hymnal) Libro de Liturgia y Cántico (also known as the Latino hymnal)

**W&P** Worship and Praise (also known as the contemporary hymnal)

Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Amos 3:3 (KJV)

#### THEME VERSE

"Now there are varieties of gifts . . . . To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." 1 Corinthians 12:4–7

#### **MAIN TEXT**

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

#### OPENING

See Devotional Reading below.

#### **Guidelines and Discussion Method** for our Time Together

To facilitate the discussion of spiritual gifts, we are going to adapt the rules for engagement and the invitation method of discussion, both of which are printed in the September 2010 issue and are available for download online at www.lutheranwom antoday.org/biblestudy. If possible, keep a copy of them with your study materials so they are always handy during your time together.

At the start of each session, we ask that you refresh your memory of these two vital elements. Adhering to them-especially when more sensitive topic areas come into play-helps assure that productive discussions can respectfully take place,

leading to growth and greater appreciation for all who are members of the body of Christ.

#### OVERVIEW

Some people have bought into the erroneous teaching that spiritual gifts are given to a select group of people and that such people are spiritually superior to others. This session explores such myths. In the course of our exploration together, we will consider the purpose of spiritual gifts and seek the confidence to boldly admit that we too have been given such gifts. (See "No Exceptions," p. 6.)

#### **DEVOTIONAL READING**

As you listen to the next passage, bear in mind that you are participating in a form of oral tradition in which these letters were originally heard. People for whom these letters were written did not have their personal printed copies of Scripture as we do today. Listening to these letters being read was a public affair-the gathered community listened to the reader and used their imaginations. Put yourself in the shoes of the people at the Corinthian church: You are not sure what is true about the gifts of the Spirit anymore. You thought you knew and understood, but there have been so many different teachings about the origin and value of each and the purpose of these gifts that you don't know what to believe anymore.

#### EAD 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11 ALOUD.

biscuss the passage using the SPECK method.

- S: Sin Does this passage suggest a sin that you need to confess? Have you looked down on others because they have gifts you considered inferior? Have you thought God did not give you any of these gifts or that you were cheated and not given enough? Have you judged some simply because they eagerly displayed their gifts?
- P: Promise Does the text offer any promises for you and your community? How has God promised to equip your community for service? What are some of the ways you can see this happening now and in the future?
- **E: Example** Is there any example in this text to follow? What did the Corinthian church do when they had this problem disrupting their community? What should you do when you don't quite understand what is being said about significant aspects of your faith?
- **C:** Command Is the text asking you to take any action? What is that action?
- **K:** Knowledge Does the text help you gain any knowledge about God, the Christian community, and about God's creation?

#### ONG (Select one)

Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness" ELW 396, WOV 684 Spirit of the Living God" TFF 101, W&P 129

#### RAYER

oving God, the giver of all good and perfect gifts, we ank you for all you have given us. We thank you specially this moment for the gift of time together in our presence. We come hungering and thirsting for e satisfaction your word gives. We ask that you, O

God, would once more grant us the joy of understanding how generous you are. Help us see the gifts that we are to one another. Help us use all gifts you have given us for building up your kingdom and the encouragement of one another in our journeys. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

#### **GATHERING TIME**

We read in 1 Corinthians that people of faith have been given spiritual gifts. In other words, we have each been gifted by God. The gifts come from the Holy Spirit and can sometimes strengthen us to do things we did not think we could do. Sometimes people around us see those gifts in us more than we do.

Here are two activities to uncover gifts (your leader will pick one for the group to do):

- **A.** Look at the list of spiritual gifts. Pick the one (or two or three) that you think is a gift that you have. Share with the person next to you why you think you have that gift and what are some ways you have used it. If you are gifted in a particular way but do not see that gift on the list, share it anyway. (See "Grateful, Not Proud," p. 42.)
- **B.** Look at the list of spiritual gifts. In groups of two, share with each other the gifts that you think the other has and why. Use this as a time to encourage each other to celebrate and acknowledge your spiritual gifts. If the list in 1 Corinthians seems to be missing a gift that one of you has, name it and celebrate that gift.

#### INTRODUCTION

Most of what we know about spiritual gifts comes from the letters of Paul. His understanding of spiritual gifts is different from how many religions think of the concept. To better grasp Paul's perspective, let us first take a look at how some other religions understand special gifts.

For most non-Christian religions, spiritual gifts are abilities bestowed upon people that go beyond mere skills or aptitude. The idea behind this understanding is that humans have been provided the means by which they can accomplish certain tasks that are beyond ordinary human abilities. With this understanding of gifts, one can obtain spiritual superiority by practicing certain disciplines or by being born under the right stars. This concept can leave God out as the source of those gifts—the gifts are there with or without God.

Thanks to Paul, Christians have a unique understanding of the gifts of the Spirit. The word Paul uses to talk about gifts of the Spirit is *charisma*. It is derived from the Greek word *charis*, which means grace. New Testament students, especially those who are Lutherans, quickly learn that grace is an overarching teaching of Paul. The idea of grace is that humans do not deserve God's goodness. The more we try to earn God's favor, the farther behind we fall. God takes the initiative in Christ to give humans that which they do not deserve without any initiative on the part of humans. Like grace, *charismata* (or gifts of the Spirit) are given free of charge. It is something arising in the mind of God and bestowed on God's people for their work among and with one another.

One can draw a distinction between how the concept is generally applied and how Paul uses it. In its general use, we would refer to it as *spiritual gifts*. Paul's use of the concept would be better called *gifts of the Spirit*. These are given for the use of those who receive them for the benefit of others. They are freely given by God.

Two points should be emphasized before we begin our study. The first is that they are a gift of grace and it is free-it has no strings attached and there are no requirements before you can receive it. It has nothing to do with merit or reward. It has everything to do with favor-God takes the initiative and gives with no demands. The second point it that they are interesting kinds of gifts. Most gifts we receive are for our own good, for our benefit. What makes the gifts of the Spirit unique are that they are not given for the benefit of the one who receives them. Rather, these gifts are for the benefit of the community, for the purpose of building the body of Christ. (See "Return to Sender," p. 22.)

The idea of God giving humans special abilities to carry out the ministries to which they are called is not unique to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God bestows upon people certain abilities that enable them to serve in God's call. One of the creation stories in the book of Genesis tells of God giving Adam something no other creature received: God breathed ruah Yahweh into Adam's nostrils. All through the Old Testament God gives gifts to people in ways that enable them serve the community where they have been called. Some of these characters include Deborah, Naomi, Samson, Samuel, David, and Ezekiel.

#### 1. How were Deborah and Naomi gifted?

During Old Testament times these spiritual gifts—sometimes called anointing and sometimes described as the Spirit of the Lord coming upon a person—were given to people who God had selected for specific purposes. This way of gifting would change over time. The change begins with the messianic age, when God's Spirit rests upon God's anointed one, Jesus. Luke 4 testifies to the fulfillment of that expectation. Then in the book of Acts it is reported that the New Testament church experienced God issuing gifts to the entire church for the edification of the community.

#### Gifts of the Spirit or spiritual gifts

For some, the phrase *spiritual gifts* means gifts that are not physical. For such people, physical gifts may be looks, height, or strength. Or they may be the gifts that

e real or tangible-gifts that one uses to make a livg or survive. Lloyds Edwards writes: "For Chrisuns, the term 'spiritual' does not mean 'non-physil' or 'not practical,' but rather 'related to God.' For aul, 'spiritual gifts' meant 'gifts from God.' Spiritual fts are from God for God's people."

There are three major bodies of texts in the ew Testament that discuss the subject of gifts of the Spirit at length. All are agreed on the notion that od gives the believers varied gifts for the good of the community and not for the individual's glory. The people of God reach the understanding that their gifts (and the gifts that others have) are for the benefit of the community, it will liberate them to acknowledge, receive, and share these gifts. (See Surprising Packages," p. 14.)

Writing in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and phesians 4, Paul makes certain that he does not we the impression that he is giving a complete list the gifts of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are amerous. Any ability one has to help build up the ody of Christ is a gift of the Spirit.

Paul discusses the many ways that the displays these gifts benefit the community. The proclamator of the word through prophesies, for example, a way in which the individual uses the gift of the point for the benefit of the community (1 Corinthias 14:3–5). Diaconal service (1 Corinthians 12:5) the ability to assist others in distress is another run of this manifestation of spiritual gifts for the bood of the community. Another way Paul thought the community benefited from an individual's gifts of the Spirit was endurance of suffering for the Gostel's sake (Philippians 1:27–30).

#### EAD 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-7.

he church at Corinth had issues . . . layers of them! ne of the biggest problems in the Corinthian comunity was the issue of the gifts of the Spirit. The community was very familiar with pagan practices related to spiritual gifts that were contrary to what Paul taught. They were not only surrounded by non-Christian practices, they had recently viewed spiritual gifts as there for the picking.

2

\*

\*

3.4

Paul had to establish some teachings about the gifts of the Spirit to set this community apart from the old ways and have them unite in purpose. This is such a serious issue that it takes Paul three chapters (12, 13, and 14) to address it. In chapter 12 Paul tells the members of the church what the origin of the gifts of the Spirit is–and the intended use of those gifts. These gifts of the Spirit are gifts from God to God's people. They are given to function together for the advancement of the faith and for the edification of the church (verses 1–11).

According to Paul, there is no hierarchy of gifts. All gifts are given by God for a common purpose, that of building up the body of Christ, the church. This idea of working together is illustrated in verses 12–26 by comparing the church to the human body in which *all* of the members have a mutual relationship in supporting the body. He admonishes the Corinthian church that as the human body is with its various parts, so also church is with its various gifts. He concludes the chapter with the exhortation that the congregation should seek gifts that are even more beneficial to the body.

#### HISTORICAL READING

This method encourages us to look beyond the text to see where it comes from, to look at its historical and cultural context. The books of the Bible were not written in a vacuum. They were written from situation to situation. Understanding these contexts help us make better sense of them in our own situations and in our own time. For example, scholars propose that the way this chapter starts suggests to us that there is some kind of history behind it.

Besides the fact that some from Chloe's household bring news of the divisions that were tearing the church apart, it appears as though the community had sent letters of inquiries to Paul concerning certain issues. One of these issues happens to be that of the gifts of the Spirit. They were not aware that the gifts had an origin and that these gifts were intended for the benefit of others. Some saw their gifts as an endorsement for lording it over others.

To understand the situation better, we should learn all we can about the historical situation of those early Christians. (See "Corinth in the Time of Paul," p. 12, November 2010 *LWT*.)

- Who are the Corinthians?
  What is Paul's relationship to this community?
- 3. What is the occasion of this writing?
- **4.** How does knowing something about the historical situation influence your understanding of the passage?

#### LITERARY READING

Literary reading encourages us to use the text to help our understanding. The method tells us the text reveals a lot about itself already. Format and rhetorical style can be helpful clues. This approach does not neglect questions of authorship or historical setting and other questions. What literary reading does, however, is ask these questions in relation to the writing and style of the text.

Our focus means we study how the author advances a position and tries to convince the reader of the validity of that position.

5. What is the literary form of this passage? (As you know, this is a letter.) Join the group in finding clues.

- **6.** How does the author build his argument? What is the argument?
- 7. How do you think the first audience heard this text?
- 8. What is the significance of charisma to the argument?
- 9. What is the author's reason for bringing up this community's former life?

#### **LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL READING**

Lutherans love the Bible! We read the Bible wearing the special lenses that make us Lutherans. We ask questions of the Bible that other Christians may not think about asking. We will apply two of these questions to 1 Corinthians 12:1–11 and see how they help us understand the text better.

#### LAW AND GOSPEL

One of the driving forces in the Lutheran's reading of Scripture is to see the pitiful condition out of which God rescues us. Humans are not only guilty of sin, we are unable to redeem ourselves. The only way we can be released from this trap is when God comes to the rescue. We try to see how Scripture speaks to these two conditions.

10. How does God intervene in the Corinthian situation? How does God intervene in our situation today?

#### **Scripture Interprets Scripture**

The argument that Paul makes in this session is extended to the end of chapter 14 in 1 Corinthians.

11. What does the love section in chapter 13 have to do with the concept of gifts of the Spirit?

#### **EFORE YOU GO**

Vriter Mary Schramm quotes Meister Eckhart, a hth-century mystic: "It often happens that what seems ivial to us is more important to God than we think aportant . . . we ought simply to follow where God ads-that is, to do what we are most inclined to do. go where we are repeatedly admonished to go-to here we feel most drawn. If we do that, God gives us is greatest in our least and never fails."

Read one or more of these texts. Make a shared list f the gifts of the Spirit in the passages. Add gifts that ou may have thought trivial.

Romans 12

1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 27–31; 14:1–19

Ephesians 4:11–12

1 Peter 4:10-11

#### LOSING

urn to the person next to you and try to tell her in our own words what is meant when people speak of ne gifts of the Spirit.

#### Song (Select one)

"O Spirit of the Living God" LBW 388 "Spirit of God, descend Upon My Heart" LBW 486

#### Prayer

All giving God, we are thankful to you for the time we have spent together learning from your word. Remind us constantly of our gifts and their purpose. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

Worship, which unites us with God, often divides us as God's people. Differences in tradition, music styles, and liturgy, can become our focus rather than our shared faith in Jesus Christ who unites us. The next session will give us an opportunity to reflect on our worship traditions and gain some appreciations for others. "God is spirit and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). 🤐

The Rev. Linda Johnson Seyenkulo, M.S., and the Rev. Jensen Seyenkulo, Ph.D., live in the Chicago area. Linda is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Park Forest, III., and Jensen is director for rostered and authorized leadership in the ELCA Vocation and Education unit.



#### Meet the Bible study authors!

Visit www.lutheranwomantoday.org.

There you can view brief videos of the Seyenkulos talking about the sessions.



## Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor by Roger A. Willer

#### INTRODUCTION

- 5 The Crisis in Health Care
- The Church and the Health Care Crisis

#### **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

- জ Health
- \$ Illness
- S Healing
- 5 Health Care

#### A VISION OF HEALTH CARE AND **HEALING AS A SHARED ENDEAVOR**

- Personal Responsibilities
- 5 The Church's Ministry
- <sup>™</sup> Congregations
- Social Ministry Organizations
- S Advocacy
- Toward a Better System of Health Care Services

- Public Health Services
- Whole Patient Care
- Caregiver Support
- Research and Technology Development
- Professional Education

#### **EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR ALL**

- A Matter of Love and Justice
- Moving Toward Just Access
- Meeting our Obligations

#### **ETHICAL GUIDANCE FOR** INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

- Mealth and Finitude

  Output

  Description

  Health and Finitude

  Health and Finitude

  Output

  Description

  Health and Finitude

  Healt
- \$ Love
- Stewardship
- S Justice
- Self-determination

#### CONCLUSION

The statement and a study guide can be downloaded at www.elca.org/socialstatements. Single printed copies can be ordered for free by calling 800-638-3522; multiple copies can be ordered for a minimal fee by calling 800-328-4648.

While debate and action about health care reform has been raging in our society, the ELCA has had a social statement-since 2003-to guide Christian thinking about health, medical ethics, and the health care system. It offers a vision for where we as a nation should be heading on these matters, even if it does not presume to know or name exact steps along the way. The issues, as demonstrated by the lengthy debates during passage of the 2010 Health Care Reform Bill, are complicated and challenging and it should not be surprising that Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor is one of the longer social statements. Instead of trying to introduce every topic covered, this article will mention the statement's major themes and highlight several distinctive and vital perspectives.

Like many ELCA social statements. its reasoning moves from an introduction of the social situation to biblical and theological themes and then on to implications and application to issues Section one acknowledges both the crisis in health care in the U.S. and our Christian responsibility. Section vo turns to biblical and theological urces to establish basic principles nd to help clarify what the ELCA eans by key but disputed terms ch as the meaning of healing, cure, id illness.

The vision of health as a shared deavor, section three, is grounded a biblical view that wholeness is a essing that God intends for all (1 hessalonians 5:23). In this vision e see that "A ministry of healing integral to the life and mission of e Church." Guided by this vision ch piece of the health care puzzle ieces as diverse as congregations nd medical research) are then disissed in succession.

Sections four and five spell out ore practical matters concerning hat the ELCA believes about uitable access to health care for and setting forth ethical guidance r individuals and families.

The major theme of the stateent is captured nicely by the title, at is, caring for health is a shared deavor that requires sustained d determined effort by all parties our society. Those responsible clude individuals, families, the urch in its various expressions, d the larger society in its varis expressions: local communities, health care providers, employers, volunteer organizations, and government at all levels.

#### THE BIBLICAL VISION

There is an important theme in the statement: individuals cannot be healthy by themselves. Each of us bears some responsibility for our own health and at the same time health and health care depend upon other people and upon conditions and actions in the wider society. The biblical vision and the beliefs that flow from it lead to perspectives and convictions within the statement that distinguish what our church believes from what many others in this extremely individualistic society believe about caring for health.

First, this vision challenges the belief that illness is equal to disease and health is equal to cure. Those equations miss the deeper dimensions of healing that depend upon restoration to God and miss the nature of life within a community of relationships. Moreover, the common equation of being well with perfect health is impossible to achieve. "'Being well' for Christians does not mean we are untouched by pain and suffering. Human beings

are finite and vulnerable, and so we recognize limits on what health and health care means." Being well for Christians means we are able to participate in Christ's love by giving ourselves for others and sharing their suffering in response to Christ who bore the suffering of all.

Second, the statement's vision counters the belief that health care should be organized primarily according to the profit motive:

"The United States does not currently have a health care system that is capable of care for all people. Significant changes in financing and structure are therefore required."

"Although health care goods and services may be bought and sold, health care is above all an activity of caring that grows out of relationships of mutual responsibility, concern, and trust-and that cannot be reduced to a commodity." Indeed it concludes, "...health care is the kind of good most appropriately given on the basis of need.

The statement holds that the ideal system of health care in society would provide a comprehensive and coherent set of services of good quality throughout life for all people. Realistically, it insists, "At a minimum, each person should have ready access to basic health care services that include preventive, acute, and chronic physical and mental health care at an affordable cost."

As a challenge to those who think solely in terms of privatization, health as a shared endeavor also "makes public health services, which focus on the population as a whole, the foundation for any health-care system."

Third, since the vision encompasses the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of people's lives, our church believes healthy activity does not involve just doctors, nurses, and hospitals. It believes each person and each congregation is, in one sense, in the health care business. The concern for well-being is part of our baptismal calling.

Each of us has responsibility "to be a good steward of his or her own health out of thankfulness for the gift of life and in order to serve God and the neighbor." This involves practicing healthy habits and participating in preventive health care. It entails more, though.

It entails attention to spiritual exercises because they contribute to our healing. It also entails action in our callings as citizens, because health is a *shared* endeavor and my health is connected to yours.

#### THE CHURCH'S CALLING

Congregations are in the health care "business" insofar as they are centered in Word and Sacrament ministry, which offers *salvation* (*salvation* is from the Latin word for *healing* or *wholeness*). Congregations are called to encourage healing through vibrant prayer, services of healing, pastoral care, and congregational health ministries.

The statement also recognizes and celebrates the many contributions that ELCA social ministry organizations make by "respectful and equitable attention to the physical, menial, and spiritual needs of those persons served."

The vision of the shared endeavor means that the church is called to be an active participant in fashioning a just and effective health care system. The primary concern of the statement is for achieving equitable access to basic health care for all. The statement recognizes that this is a major social challenge but the statement calls the whole ELCA to commit itself to working with all members and groups of society in thoughtful engagement in order to attain this goal. The ethical prin-

ciples of agape love and justice are to guide that participation.

In 2003, the statement called for reform of the U.S. health care sys tem: "The United States does no currently have a health care system that is capable of care for all people Significant changes in financing and structure are therefore required. The statement did not specify any particular system for achieving tha reform but rather concluded: "Ou obligation could be met through any one of several combinations o personal, market, and governmen tal means, although none of these means alone can provide equitable access to health care." The poin was to look for a mix of means tha would make equitable access avail able for all.

Did the 2010 Health Care Reform Bill match the statement's vision? That question is one good reason to read the ELCA statement but not the only one. The statement reminds us: "The Gospel offers the world the hope of abundant and everlasting life, that liberates us from idolatry of health and fear of death. Out of this freedom, Christians can accept the limits of this life and seek to realize a vision of health care for all people as a shared endeavor."

The Rev. Dr. Roger A. Willer is director for the department for studies in ELCA Church in Society.

## WOMEN Quilting Boldly

When Women of the ELCA conducted a survey a couple of years ago, respondents said what they like best about the organization is being in community with one another. Apparently, another thing they really like is quilting! Read about these women whose faith communities offer care through quilts.

e Quilters of Nathanael Lutheran Church, Alcester, S.D., began making quilts in 1984, using new fabric, old sheets, edspreads, drapes, and worn clothing. By March 2010, they had put together 5,000. Most were shipped to



Lutheran World Relief, local charities, high school graduates, and local families in need. Pictured are front row, l-r: Dorothy Johnson, LaVila Johnson, Luella Holthe; middle row: Marion Manning, Arla Roduner, Gladys Mollet, Donna Pederson, Doris Carlson; back row: Carol Anderson, Loris Carlson, Jean Nelson, Wava Homandberg. Submitted by Loris Carlson (who wrote, "This is not an error—it really is 5,000.")

e Quilters at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Emporia, Kan., made this quilt and two more for the Camp Tomah Shinga Kaw Indian phrase meaning shining water) auction. Every summer the Lutheran camp has a quilt auction to



raise money. Our quilters have participated in the auction for many years. Camp Tomah Shinga, near Junction City, Kan., is operated by the Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Association of Kansas and the Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries. Pictured are, 1-r, Nadine James, Dorothy Becker, Betty VanSickle, Carol Mitchell, Shirley Depew, Angela Brown, Judy Robinson, Jerry Rogers, Lois Steinel, Eleanor Browning, Pam Abel, and Joyce Throm. Submitted by Nadine Tames

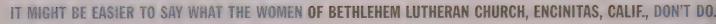
e Bethlehem Lutheran Quilters of Grand Marais, Minn., have been quilting since 1970 and have made 1,000 quilts er the past five years. Quilts are sent to local people in need at the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, local church



camps, an apartment complex for the homeless in St. Paul (The Center for Changing Lives) and the Damiano Center in Duluth, which feeds and clothes the needy and homeless. A quilt is also made for each baptized child and every Bethlehem high school graduate. The group has raised \$2,140 for new windows at the church by selling quilts. Pictured are, 1-r, Mildred Thoreson, Carol Berglund, Joan Bieber, Gladys Dockan, Gwen Lenz, Eleanor Waha, chair, Jody Daugherty, Teresa Chmelik, and Sally Arnsten. Submitted by Gwen Lenz

## AMA PROJECT wakes up community

by Terri Lackey



Maybe windows. But if someone thought it would be a good ministry, they'd probably take it on.

Twenty women from the church assembled earlier this year to talk about their ministry successes and how they serve the church, community, and the world.

Of course, they have their quilters-Scraps and Prayers-a group that turns out about 100 quilts a year. Sixty are full-sized, 30 are baby quilts, and some are prayer quilts that go to members of the congregation who are ill. A few go to those who have reached their 100th birthday. Some specially made quilts of "masculine material" go to the Wounded Warriors Battalion at nearby Camp Pendleton.

This group of women take a different approach than other groups. Rather than send all of their quilts to Lutheran World Relief (LWR), they accept donations for them from the congregation. They then send the money to LWR's Project Comfort Fund to buy bricks for the Good Samaritan Quilt Plaza at LWR's Baltimore headquarters. That money is used for shipping quilts overseas.

The women have bought "12 to 14 bricks for \$500 each," according to Trudy Disselhorst, one of the long-standing participants of the group. The bricks are engraved with names, she said. "We gave one for the Women of the ELCA."

Bethlehem has its knitters too. Hala Behymer, ("She's a doctor!" many told me) started a knitting prayer shawl ministry about a year ago. The group is small right nowabout 10 members-but the ministry they offer is healing, to both the giver and receiver. "The look on the faces of the recipient of these shawl just touches your heart," Behyme said. Those who know how to kni and those who want to learn are invited to the group. They even le in a couple of crocheters-Lynn Miller and Susan Scott.

The women have two Bibl study groups-Ruth and Lydia Cir cles-and they are active in the oth ers ministries of the church. The are in the choir, both voice and handbells; they serve in the Stepher Ministry; they make banners (th



Barbara Beerman, a California snowbird from Salt Lake City, Utah, sews on a quilt.



Left to right are: Belinda Simonini, Doris Anderson, Kim Oswald, Trudy Disselhorst, Molly Hall, Alice Titus, and Laure Reynolds.

new pastor-the Rev. Laura Ziehl-likes to call that liturgical art); they serve as ushers and on the church council. They even have a par-

nurse, Rose Moldenhauer, who es to "make sure everybody in e congregation is physically, menly, and spiritually healthy."

One member of the group is social-justice advocate. Dianne ichols heads Bethlehem's Center r Global Awareness and gets the urch involved in poverty, divery, and clean water issues.

But it is the Pajama Project that akes their souls.

#### nnel Pajamas

linda Simonini came up with the ea more than a decade ago after e made some flannel pajamas for r two young sons for Christmas. wanted them to look cute for eir Christmas morning photos." nen she made some for other

young members of her family, and the idea blossomed. "The kids just appreciated them so much, I had the idea to make them for local charities. These are well-made flannel pajamas, with ribbing around the sleeves, waist, and legs."

The project has grown outside the church and is now a community effort. One Saturday a month, from February through October, a group gets together at Bethlehem cutting fabric to pattern and placing it in plastic baggies for volunteer sewers to take home and complete.

Even men and boys get involved. They set up tables on which the 30 or so volunteers work. Some church members offer meals on that day; others rush the fabric stores to get great deals, still others offer monetary gifts.

In 2009, thanks to the organizing efforts of Bethlehem member and project chairperson Sherie Whiting, more than 1,200 pairs of pajamas were given to 13 charities

in San Diego county and Tijuana, Mexico. Doris Anderson, a 93-yearold volunteer, made 130 sets of pajamas last year (down from 230 the year before, but only because she was busy making quilts and working on embroidering projects that she completes using a computer program).

On each pair of pajamas a note is stitched into the collar in both Spanish and English: "Made with love just for you."

"Bethlehem has always been a nurturing congregation," Disselhorst said. "We are a very busy church."

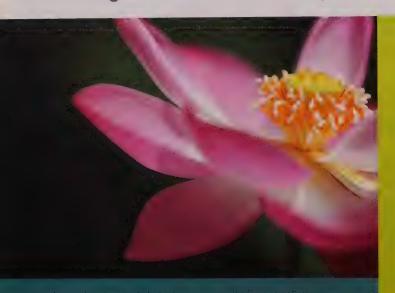
Pastor Laura added that, "Bethlehem Lutheran is a congregation with a heart for mission. My gift as pastor is to try to keep up with the many hearts and hands that reach out into our community and the world in Jesus' name." 👐

Terri Lackey is managing editor of Lutheran Woman Today.



## Celebrate Your Faith with Family and Friends

Eighth Triennial Gathering • July 14-17, 2011 • Spokane, Wash.



"The intergenerational connections made between women of faith were amazing." —Amy Santoriello, 34, Zion Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, PA

"It's fellowship with family time. I encourage mothers to invite their daughters and daughters to invite their mothers."

—SUSAN HUMPHREY, 55, JOY LUTHERAN CHURCH, TULSA, OK

Are you looking for a life-changing experience that will inspire you to live out your faith? Share the inspiration with family and friends. Extend your hand to the next generation. Invite someone new to accompany you!

**Connect with Lutheran sisters.** Enjoy fellowship. Find someone like you.

**Escape the busyness of your life.** Renew your spirit. Rejoice!

**Discover your heart for service.** Respond to your calling. Make a difference.

Attend workshops, exhibits, prayer services, city tours, and many other activities. Speakers include Peacemaker Leymah Gbowee whose interfaith efforts brought peace to civil wartorn Liberia.

## Register today!

www.womenoftheelca.org/triennial1 Early bird savings ends Jan. 7, 2011.







RACE NOTES

Linda Post Bushkofsky



Maybe you've seen the saying "Raising children is the hardest job you'll ever love." It is a hard job. I imagine mothers in every century and in every corner of the earth have thought long and hard about the challenges in raising children. For some, today's challenges are violence, drugs, and gangs. For others, the challenges are simply putting enough food on the table and

keeping a non-foreclosed-upon dry roof

overhead. For still others, the challenges

come in bullying, underfunded schools,

and inadequate daycare.

Some sources claim it costs upwards of \$250,000 to raise a child from birth to 18 in the United States. That figure doesn't take into account the emotional and spiritual costs of raising children, nor the effect that parenting can have on adult relationships, careers, and professional advancement.

Grandparents have always played some role in helping to raise children but studies show that the number of children living with their grandparents has increased by 50 percent over the last 10 years. AARP reports that 8 percent of grandparents provide daycare on a regular basis and that 3 percent are raising a grandchild. Chances are that a good portion of you reading this column today are raising a grandchild, just as my husband and I are doing.

I love the sloppy kisses that come from our three-year-old grandson. His sing-songy "I looove you, Nonna" is music to my ears. I know that at 51 I have more patience in raising him than

I might have had at 21. I sure don't have all the answers, though. I hadn't a clue about potty training (we had adopted our daughter at 11, blissfully well beyond that stage). How do I teach him the Lord's Prayer? Will I keep up with him when he's five or 10 years old? (I'm especially thankful to have had both knees replaced this year, as that will no doubt help!)

There's another popular saying: "Children don't come with an instruction book." How true! Which mother among us hasn't wished for some help now and again? I'm pleased to say that beginning next month, Lutheran Woman Today will offer some spiritual help to those who parent in a new column called Family Matters. This unique column will be written by two authors. The newly retired Susan Gamelin, who is a mother of four and grandmother of nine, will share the duties with the younger Elyse Nelson Winger, mother of two. Both Susan and Elyse are ELCA pastors with a gift for sharing insights into the ordinary and extraordinary moments of parenting.

Whatever role you play in the lives of youngsters-mother, grandmother, aunt, Sunday school teacher, scout leader, neighbor-you will find help in this new column. Now's the time, too, to consider giving a subscription to Lutheran Woman Today to that new or struggling mom (or grandmom) you know. This may be as close as some of us ever get to an instruction book!

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

## Grateful, Not Proud

by Catherine Malotky

## Years ago, I spoke to

a group of 200 Women of the ELCA participants at a synodical gathering. A good way into my address, I made a request. I would read a list of spiritual gifts, and participants were to stand if they saw the gift I named in themselves.

My list was relatively long, and was not limited to the usual powerhouses: healing, prophecy, tongues, preaching, or wisdom. I went well beyond to the kinds of everyday things that women excel at: hospitality, compassion, listening, giving support, patience, endurance, and even laughter.

No one stood up. Not one of those 200 women stood up for even one of the listed gifts. Well. I had to think fast, because I *knew* they had these gifts. Was this modesty? Decades of exhortations to be humble and not toot your own horn or brag?

Quietly I said, "Ladies, you have these gifts. Let's do this again. But this time, do not imagine yourself being proud when you stand. Instead, stand because you are grateful. Your gifts are God-given. Standing is a confession of faith in the God who made you as you are. Are you ready?"

This time, they stood. The first few were cautious, looking around to be sure they were not the only ones. As we made our way through the list, more and more women stood, until finally, by the end of the list, we all stood, gratefully confessing God's miraculous creating power in us. We looked around at each other and were inspired by God's generosity.

God, this gifts thing is hard. We so quickly start measuring ourselve against others, wondering if we are sufficient. But you have made the point that every gift has its place, and every gift has been called into service.

Some gifts are flashier, of course but every gift is needed for the body of Christ to thrive.

You call us into the service of the neighbor, whoever that might be, near or far. Our gifts are to be returned again in your name for the purpose of bringing your mercy and justice to life in our world. If we hoard our gifts and us them only in our inner circle, then we are not heeding your call. If we hide our gifts, and imagine they have no value then we are just as surely withholding them from your service.

You call us to be sturdy, God, and to be grateful and brave about sharing our gifts, whatever they are. You call us to be wise, to know which of our gifts will serve your purpose in this time and for this situation. You call us to be generous so that many might be blessed, including us in our giving.

O God, you have filled us with the Holy Spirit for the common good. Make us sturdy and wise and generous with the gifts you have given, that we might see in each other the miracle of your creation and the wonder of your power among us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Board of Pensions as retirement planning man ager. An ordained pastor, she has also been a editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.

## CO-ED QUILLERS

A few good men (and several women) comprise the quilting group at Trinity Lutheran Church, Bonners Ferry, Idaho. "Trinity Lutheran quilters have been meeting as long as anyone can remem-

ber, and we still meet every Wednesday morning," wrote Elaine Peterson. What makes their group different from other quilters are the "three faithful men" that attend every meeting. "Those three men



are there more than the women," she said. In 2009, the group sent 500 quilts to LWR along with health, layette, sewing and school kits. By spring 2010, they sent 321.

#### **LWT** Editorial Office

For editorial feedback, magazine promotion questions, article suggestions, or advertising inquires write or e-mail:

LWT Editorial Office

Women of the ELCA

8765 W. Higgins Rd.

Chicago, IL 60631-4189

800-638-3522

lwt@elca.org

www.lutheranwomantoday.org

#### **Bible Study Resource Orders**

Bible Study Leader Guides, Companion Bibles, etc. www.augsburgfortress.org 800-328-4648

#### **Visit our Blogs**

http://blogs.elca.org/lwtmagazine http://blogs.elca.org/women

#### **Bible Study Videos**

www.lutheranwomantoday.org/biblestudy

#### DIRECTORY OF READER SERVICES

#### SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE

Change of address, renewals, questions about your subscription, and new subscription orders must be addressed to our subscription order center at Augsburg Fortress. 1 year/10 issues \$12

#### 800-328-4648

LWT Subscription Order Center Box 1553 Minneapolis, MN 55440-8730 subscriptions@augsburgfortress.org

#### **Audiotape edition**

800-328-4648

#### **Permission to reprint articles**

800-421-0239

copyright@augsburgfortress.org

Stir the spirit within! Go to www.boldcafe.org.

## the magazine of Women ELCA

#### եվքլչենիչիկներիկանիրնուի այլաինինական

#81000056489# 1000000547 LW1286 MAR11 GRADUATE THEOL UNION 262

2400 RIDGE RD LIBRARY-SERIALS DEPT P002524

253 BERKELEY CA 94709-1212

Please direct all changes of address to Augsburg Fortress, Publishers (see Reader Services).

#### Fill a young child with wonder at God's creation.

#### Choose title:

- ☐ The Little Lutheran
- ☐ The Little Christian

#### Choose subscription length:

- ☐ 1 year (10 issues): \$24.95
- ☐ 2 years (20 issues): \$45
- ☐ 3 years (30 issues): \$59

#### Send to:

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_

Gift from

(Please use the name the child

knows you by.)

#### Bill to:

☐ Payment enclosed

☐ Bill me

Adult's name \_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_Zip \_\_\_\_

#### Mail completed form to:

The Little Lutheran; Augsburg Fortress,

Publishers; P.O. Box 1553;

Minneapolis, MN 55440-8730





subscribe call 800-328-4648 o visit www.thelittlelutheran.org